

true to your own high heart and spare me. See, I who for so long was the ruler of many kingdoms, kneel to you and pray you to spare me," and, casting herself down upon her knees, she laid her head upon my feet and wept.

All that scene comes back to me with a strange and terrible vividness, although I had no sight to aid me in its details, save the sight of my soul. I remember that the wonder and the horror of it pierced me through and through; the stab of the dagger in my eyes was not more sharp. There was I, Olaf, a mere gentleman of the North, seated in my chair of office, and there before me, her mighty head bowed upon my feet, knelt the Empress of the Earth pleading for her life. In truth all history could show few stranger scenes. What was I to do? If I yielded to her piteous prayers, it was probable that my own life and those of my wife and children would pay the price. Yet how could I clap my hands in their Eastern fashion and summon the executioners to pierce those streaming eyes of hers?

"Rise, Augusta," I said, for in this extremity of her shame I gave her back her title, "and tell me, you who are accustomed to such matters, how I can spare you who deal with the lives of others as well as with my own?"

"I thank you for that name," she said as she struggled to her feet. "I've heard it shouted by tens of thousands in the circus and from the throats of armies, but never yet has it been half so sweet to me as now from lips that have no need to utter it. In times bygone I'd have paid you for this service with a province, but now Irene is so poor that, like some humble beggar-woman, she can but give her thanks. Still, repeat it no more, for next time it will sound